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## ABSTRACT

In a study that investigated the most serious composition problems perceived by teachers of high school senior English and college freshman composition, a questionnaire was sent to all 34 of the Mississippi colleges offering freshman composition and a random sample of 34 Mississippi high schools. Respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of 30 described writing problems. A coversheet was affixed to the questionnaire requesting that certain demographic information be used to better understand the respondents and to construct a profile of the instructors. Results indicated that seven student writing problems were perceived as being most serious by respondents at both levels: (1) failure to provide supporting details for generalized statements; (2) failure to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence; (3) inability to write in a formal, objective style; (4) failure to proofread papers; (5) lack of enjoyment in writing; (6) failure to adequately limit papers; and (7) poor spelling. (Cover letters to the respondents, tally sheets, and data on the teaching experience of respondents are appended.)  
(HOD)

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ARTICULATION BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR AND COLLEGE FRESHMAN  
COMPOSITION: A STUDY OF THE MOST SERIOUS WRITING ERRORS  
AS PERCEIVED BY MISSISSIPPI HIGH SCHOOL AND  
COLLEGE ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

BY

GENEVA ENGLAND

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I should also like to acknowledge the assistance and encouragement extended to me by the other members of my advisory board: Dr. Louis Dollarhide, Professor of English, and Dr. Stanley Easton, Associate Professor of Secondary Education.

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Geneva England

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Composition teachers are like "barnyard geese," each morning being a "brand new world."<sup>1</sup> They have adopted one "new" method after another in an effort to combat the "writing crisis." Transformational grammar, linguistics, criterion-referenced evaluation, extensive mode, transactional writing, structural grammar, and expressive writing are but a few of the English innovations introduced in the late 1960's. The failure of these methods to produce any measurable gains in students' writing abilities has launched a "back-to-basics" movement and a barrage of charges between college instructors and high school English teachers.<sup>2</sup>

College instructors accuse secondary English teachers of ineffective teaching and fail large numbers of freshmen composition students to prove their superiority. The secondary teachers counter by teaching "college preparation" to prove their students can "make the grade." Not knowing exactly what constitutes college preparedness in composition, the teachers concentrate on improving the writing weaknesses they assume

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Bryant, "A Brand New World Every Morning," College Composition and Communication 25 (February 1974): 30, quoted in Donald C. Stewart, "The Barnyard Goose, History, and Fred Newton Scott," English Journal 67 (November 1978): 14.

<sup>2</sup>Donald McQuade, "'Who Do You Think You're Talking To': Trading Ideas for Insults in the English Profession," English Journal 65 (November 1976): 8.

to be most serious. About the only thing they agree on is that college-bound students must be marked stiffly and stretched to their fullest potential if they are to succeed in college.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the student is being victimized by the senior English teacher-freshman composition instructor "tug-o'-war."

"We are goalless," was the conclusion drawn by John Kinnard, after surveying the English departments. He perceived that little coordination exists between high school training in English offerings and the college expectations.<sup>4</sup>

Statistics available from one university- the University of Georgia-show that 40 percent of the entering freshmen in 1976 were deficient on the placement test which stressed English composition. Of those completing the freshman course in English, 20 percent failed the Regent's Exam, a system-wide literacy test.<sup>5</sup> Even the institutions that glory in their high academic standards, such as the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign<sup>6</sup> and City College of New York<sup>7</sup> are finding that freshmen lack the basic

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<sup>3</sup>Carolyn Shaw, "The Community-Bound: A Positive Approach," English Journal 66 (November 1977): 37.

<sup>4</sup>John Kinnard, English Journal 62 (March 1973): 762, quoted in Marna Broekhoff, "Criterion-Referenced Evaluation as an Alternative," English Journal 67 (October 1978): 32.

<sup>5</sup>Jane M. Agree, "The Realities of College Composition Courses," English Journal 66 (November 1977): 59.

<sup>6</sup>James J. Scanlon, "Student Writing: The Problem and the Solutions- A Complete Report on the Use of English," Illinois English Bulletin 64, no.2 (December 1976-January 1977), p.2.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Bishop, ed., The Concern for Writing: Focus 5 (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 159 674, 1978), pp. 2-3.

composition skills.<sup>8</sup>

John Rouché reported that universities are "up to their armpits" with hundreds of thousands of "college students" who can not read or write well enough to pass college level work. From a national survey he conducted, Rouché found that most of these were "high school 'A' students lacking verbal skills requisite for minimal tasks."<sup>9</sup>

The problem of teaching writing preparedness to high school seniors so they will succeed in college composition courses has been the topic of many research studies, seminars, and professional articles.<sup>10</sup> The results, however, are conflicting and inconclusive. After a two-year longitudinal study, completed in 1962, Donald Harris concluded that "the study of English grammar terminology had a negligible effect" on learning composition skills. A report of the Dartmouth Conference of 1967 stated that grammar had no effect on writing skills.

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<sup>8</sup>At Urbana-Champaign only 8 percent of the writing samples taken from approximately two hundred freshmen with 27 ACT-English scores possessed reasonable command of the five basics of expository writing. At CCNY only one third of the freshmen were ready for college level English, with nearly 90 percent taking remedial writing.

<sup>9</sup>John Rouché, "What is College Level, or Why Can't College Students Read and Write?" The Clearing House 50 (April 1977): 332.

<sup>10</sup>Researchers concerned with these findings would be interested in reading the following: Gene Lyon's controversial "The Higher Illiteracy," Harper's, September 1978; Gertrude Collins, A Comparative Study of Teaching Writing Skills to Twenty Students in a Community College and a Local High School, (Ph. D. dissertation, Boston College, 1975); and the studies made by Charles Cooper, who as the coordinator of the English Department at the State University of New York at Buffalo had conducted much research into the composing process and the

Conversely, structural and transformational grammar were adopted and abandoned. Studies of these two methods likewise showed no effect-or negative effect- on writing skills.<sup>11</sup> John Illo, in his study, "From Senior to Freshman: A Study of Performance in Composition in High School and College," sought to establish a relationship between various factors and indices (including home activities, high school instruction, and family) with college success. He hypothesized that emotion, purpose, and will of the student is more directly responsible for success than other factors, such as intelligence and quality of preparation in writing.<sup>12</sup>

Marlene Hache studied the effects of high school writing programs on college composition and concluded that students can not write in college because they have not written in high school. Further, she cited one reason students are not encouraged to write is that high school teachers are not themselves trained to teach writing.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the problem of what to teach, and how, is monumental.

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teaching of writing, encompassing the provocative current ideas on teaching writing.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth F. Haynes, "Using Research in Preparing to Teach Writing," English Journal 67 (January 1978): 83.

<sup>12</sup>John Illo, "From Senior to Freshman: A Study of Performance in English Composition in High School and College," Research in the Teaching of English 10 (Fall 1976): 137-46.

<sup>13</sup>Marlene D. Hache, High School Writing Programs and Their Effect on College Composition (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 181 468, 1977), pp. 7-8.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the most serious composition<sup>14</sup> problems as perceived by high school<sup>15</sup> senior English teachers and college<sup>16</sup> freshman composition instructors. By focusing attention on the most serious weaknesses in composition as perceived by both secondary and college instructors, English teachers at both levels can improve their instruction, especially secondary English teachers of college preparatory<sup>17</sup> classes so there will be smoother transition<sup>18</sup> from high school senior English to college composition.

The scope of this study is not intended to explore the best

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<sup>14</sup>Composition (Writing)- a basic skill that stresses clear and correct thinking expressed in simple, as well as in complex, sentence and paragraph structure—usually covered spasmodically all four years of high school with six hours being required for most college freshmen. It includes (1) rhetoric- "putting it across"-(See Wayne Booth, "The Rhetorical Stance," College Composition and Communication 14 (October 1962): 139); or writing that uses the most effective means of persuasion on any subject; and (2) standards, or agreed upon rules, for transmitting ideas as set forth in any writing handbook (See Edward Fagan, "Writing Standards: One Rationale," English Journal 65 (February 1976):20).

<sup>15</sup>Secondary (High School)-term(s) used to denote accredited public, private, or parochial educational centers offering a college preparatory curriculum and serving grades seven through twelve, or any grades thereof.

<sup>16</sup>College (university)-term(s) used to include public, private, and parochial institutions of higher learning (i.e., junior colleges, four-year colleges, and universities).

<sup>17</sup>College preparatory- a course of study that emphasizes liberal arts courses, sets minimum standards, and minimum number of credits in order to meet entrance requirements of colleges.

<sup>18</sup>Transition (articulation)- term(s) used in this study to mean the "efficient fitting together of high school and college courses" (See Donald J. Gray, "Articulation Between High School and College English," The College Teaching of English (Bethesda, MD.: ERIC Reproduction Services, ED C21 877, 1965, p. 257.

methods for teaching these skills, as these have received extensive coverage in the past few years. Methodology is a continuous problem that would lend itself to further time and study, not applicable to this study.

#### THE STUDY

This study was conducted in the following manner:

1. Directories of the Mississippi colleges and high schools were used to locate names and addresses.
2. A manageable number of high schools were selected by simple random sampling to match the number of institutions of higher education in Mississippi.
3. The measurement instrument was adapted from Thomas Newkirk, Thomas Cameron, and Cynthia Selfe's instrument designed to study freshmen writing weaknesses as perceived by instructors at the university of Texas at Austin.
4. A questionnaire and letter of transmittal were mailed to the high school senior English teachers and to the chairmen of the Departments of English at the colleges. The chairmen were requested to direct the questionnaire to a freshman composition instructor.
5. After the data were collected, the responses to the demographic information and to the writing problems were tallied separately for the high school and college respondents.
6. Each writing problem was ranked as to mean. This ranking reflected the seriousness of each writing problem as perceived by the respondents.

7. The seriousness of the writing problems was discussed separately for the high school responses and college responses, and then compared.

By analyzing the results of this study, this researcher hoped to locate the disparities that presently exist between high school and college composition teachers in Mississippi and to help mitigate such differences by publishing the results of this study. Also, the respondents to the questionnaire were mailed a copy of the results, if requested.

It was the intent of this study to determine the degree to which high school English teachers and freshman instructors agree or disagree on the same writing problems. It was hoped the survey results would suggest possible inferences helpful to both levels of instructors with the ultimate goal of helping the students learn important writing skills, as well as succeed in freshman composition.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY HISTORY OF ARTICULATION EFFORTS

The concern for a smooth and beneficial transition of high school English students into freshman composition is recorded as far back as 1893 when the Committee of Ten of the National Education Association tried to standardize the high school curriculum to conform to college entrance requirements.<sup>1</sup> An attempt in the early 1900's at articulation-"the efficient fitting together of high school and college courses"-<sup>2</sup>is evident from the report made by Oscar J. Campbell in 1934 for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). He enumerated the general responsibilities of the secondary and college teachers in high schools as follows: the students should be taught to express themselves adequately, to reason out major and subordinate ideas, to recognize major literary forms and to perceive the arrangement and development of ideas in both prose and poetry, and to be able to write for different purposes; in college the students should be taught to

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<sup>1</sup>James Ely Cocrane, An Analysis of the Transition From High School to college in English Composition in Selected New York State Schools (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1956), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Donald J. Gray, "Articulation Between High School and College English," The College Teaching of English (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Reproduction Services, ED 021 877, 1965), p. 257. For a more detailed coverage of the early history of articulation, see: Erwin Steinert, "Articulation: A Sermon," College English 10 (1959) : 363-64; High School-College Articulation in the United States (Tallahassee, 1953).

write with greater depth and broader range and to investigate the indepth meaning of literature.<sup>3</sup>

Several studies by universities were completed from 1945-1950 with conclusions drawn that high schools were not preparing students to write well enough to meet the expectations of college English teachers.<sup>4</sup> The problem was, and remains to be, what do college English teachers expect? During the early twentieth century, the greatest obstacle to the articulation in English composition was a confusion of aims at the high school and college levels. This was further complicated by a lack of effort to create an interdependence between the two levels, a lack of sequence in curriculum, a lack of communication of the success or failure of students in college, and the lack of correctly predicting student success despite the reasonably good predicting devices available.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, high school teachers were suspicious of the counsel of college teachers, and college teachers were irresponsible in their counsel. Even though there were college recommendations available that specified what should be covered in high school English courses, there were no explanations as to why and how these books and rhetorical practices were to be taught.<sup>6</sup> This situation led to the reciprocated accusations from both levels, thus making progress in articulation very difficult.

Basically, three problems were perceived by the teachers

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<sup>3</sup>James Oscar Campbell, Teaching of College English (New York ), pp. 19-33.

<sup>4</sup>Cocrane, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>Gray, p. 257.

as areas for improvement in smoothing out the student transition from high school to college composition. The first was to properly inform the students of the transition problems. The second was to engage the college and high school teachers in a meaningful exchange of their methods, standards, purposes, and achievements. The third was to bring about changes in the nature and content of the high school and college English courses so that they connected with one another. The students were often informed during High School College Days and Orientation Week of the transition problems; however, the other two points were often neglected.

A positive and progressive articulation program was needed. To meet this need to improve the transition from high school to college composition, numerous committees and conferences were founded to inform teachers at both levels what they needed to know so that their curriculums could be coordinated. By 1959 twenty-six states had committees or agencies working on problems of articulation. Six states added these by 1959, and by 1962 the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on Articulation reported that forty state departments of education recognized that such agencies were needed and were, in the absence of any, organized agency, trying to inform high school and college teachers about the other.<sup>7</sup> Regional seminars and summer institutes were organized by the Commission of English of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB), to instruct in-service

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 257-60.

teachers.<sup>8</sup> In the summer of 1962, the Commission on English started Project English with twenty regional institutes, which enrolled nine hundred high school teachers. It has since published a course of study prepared jointly by college instructors in cooperation with high school teachers and with the help of professional curriculum consultants. The next year the directors of the institutes were available for consultation for those classroom teachers needing assistance in incorporating the new ideas into their curriculums.<sup>9</sup> The courses of study reflected the consensus of teachers-both college and secondary-that English was to be "the study of what language is and how it works in the books students read and the themes they write." By Project English setting both minimum and maximum limits on what was to be taught at each level, it attempted to obtain maximum continuity in the English course of study.

Summer institutes were seen as one very positive means of correcting dissimilarities in composition instruction between the high schools and colleges. By the end of 1964, the National Defense Education Act ensured the establishment of summer institutes for both elementary and secondary teachers.<sup>10</sup>

Even more specific definitions of what colleges and

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<sup>8</sup>For the history of the summer institutes at the University of Michigan and a plan to include courses like those taught in the CEB institutes in regular offerings of college English, see: John C. Gerber's "The 1962 Summer Institutes of the Commission on English: Their Achievement and Promise," *PMLA* 73, no. 4, part 2 (September 1963) : 9-25.

<sup>9</sup>Gray, p. 276.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 268-9.

high school teachers expected at each grade level was needed. To help meet this need, the Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English published a pamphlet containing four sets of examinations for college-bound students in grades nine through twelve. This consisted of the questions and a selection of student answers to each question, complete with an analysis and evaluation to each answer. This offered some degree of standardization for each level.<sup>11</sup>

Committees and Continuing Conferences, such as Yale's MAT Conference and the Standing Curriculum Committee at the University of Washington were organized by colleges, or jointly by colleges and secondary school systems, to aid in student transition from secondary to college. Regionally, groups were formed, such as the High School-College Relations Committee of the Northwest Interstate Council and the North Central Association. The NCTE maintained state and regional affiliates as did other national organizations. Special problem organizations were founded, such as The Basic Issues Conference of the Cooperative English Program, which was formed to define the questions that would arise if a sequence of instruction in English was to be effectively devised.<sup>12</sup>

After the Conference on Basic Issues in the Teaching of English focused attention on the need for a program that was "sequential and cumulative from the kindergarten through graduate school," the NCTE published several concrete suggestions:

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

- "(1) focus instruction in English upon the study of language, literature, and composition,
- "(2) educate teachers of English to the development and sequential nature of the study and institute a national program for encouraging articulation of English students throughout school years,
- "(3) improve present preparatory programs for teachers of English,
- "(4) improve the preparation of practicing teachers of English,
- "(5) encourage significant research about teaching of English." 13

It further stressed that the two departments should cooperate in the administration of courses in the methods of teaching English, and, whenever possible, teachers of English education should hold appointments in the departments of English.<sup>14</sup> Eighty College English Departments at a conference held at Allerton Park in 1962 made such a commitment. Resulting from this meeting, the Association of Departments of English began functioning with one of its goals being to improve the training of elementary and secondary teachers of language arts.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the work of these state, regional, and national committees and organizations did little toward articulation other than interpret college admissions policies, but several have survived over the decades to be very beneficial in resolving

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<sup>13</sup> Lois Josephs, "The Role of Higher Education in Improving the Curriculum in English," The Proceedings of the Nineteenth National Conference on Higher Education (Washington, 1964), p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "Resolutions Adopted at a Seminar of English Department Chairmen Held at Allerton Park, December 2-4, 1962," College English 24(1963): 473-75; James R. Squire, "The

some of the problems. Activities that have resulted include syllabi for high school English courses, descriptions of first year English courses in colleges, an exchange of classroom visits and lectures, themes graded to illustrate college standards, and joint membership on curriculum and methods studies and committees.

Likewise, the joint efforts of organizations, universities, and high schools have rendered much useful information over the past few years. The 1962 NCTE Committee on High School-College Articulation reported that about half of the 110 colleges questioned were engaging in some form of liaison with high schools, and had sponsored meetings between high school and college teachers. <sup>16</sup>

A program at the Western Michigan University was begun in the early 60's to improve the incongruities existing between high school and college English departments. High school principals were invited to the university campus to confer with the past graduates about their problems in freshman composition and to confer with the college English teachers of these students. Other colleges expanded this program by inviting high school juniors to attend-or observe- college courses to help prepare the students for the transition. Many college departments made offers to mark and grade a limited number of high school themes, and some arranged conferences between the college teacher who graded the

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Profession Faces the Future: Developments Since Allerton Park," College English 26 (1964) : 38-42.

<sup>16</sup>"High School-College Liaison Program," English Journal 51 (September 1962) : 85-93.

the theme and the high school teacher of the students who wrote the themes. Several colleges even furnished high school teachers with marked and graded themes of former students.<sup>17</sup>

Remedial classes, Advanced Classes, and exemptions were introduced; these, however, generally reinforced inefficiency rather than attacked the source of the problem. Another idea for smoothing transition was to enroll the most capable high school students in the equivalent of college courses--some for college credit. Some schools experimented with moving college remedial English courses to the senior high school year.<sup>18</sup> The most ambitious of the programs originated to bring high school and college teachers and courses together was the Advanced Placement Program. In this program, the equivalent of freshmen composition was established in high school to help those students who demonstrated unusual achievement. Outcomes of this program have had national impact--it has distributed course descriptions and some examinations, and, in 1961-2, its goals "reminded" teachers of their obligation to the "normal" student, even if that meant going farther "down the scale" in individualized

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<sup>17</sup>Gray, p. 259. For additional information on how colleges inform high school students and teachers of college expectations, see: J. Andrew Holley, "Next Steps in High School-College Relations," North Central Association Quarterly 26 (1952): 320-31; Alfred H. Grommon, "Coordinating Composition in High School and College," English Journal 44 (1959): 123-31; J. N. Hook, "How Can the Continuity in the Study of the Language Arts, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities in High School and the First Two Years of College Be Improved," Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Conference on Higher Education (Washington, 1960), pp. 79-80; and the numerous reports in College Composition and Communication during the 1950's and 60's.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 265-67. For additional information on

planning.<sup>19</sup>

One college-high school articulation meeting on composition in 1964 sponsored by the New Jersey Association of Teachers of English devised a way to use advantageously the results of the College Writing Samples compiled by the CEEB. Five representative papers were sent to various colleges for evaluation based on the standards of freshman composition at that college. These were then used in analyzing what composition instructors expected. This idea was adopted by several other schools.<sup>20</sup>

These promising exchanges resulted largely from the work of state associations, local affiliations of national organizations, and college departments of English. In the decade of the 60's college teachers, individually and in groups, tried to help articulation by conducting research and by including statements of expectations in their speeches, pamphlets, and scholarly articles. The most commonly stated expectations specified that the students must know about language and literature and be able to apply this knowledge; to distinguish between the main and subordinate ideas; to test the logical validity of moderately difficult prose; to apprehend structure and tone of prose and poetry; to recognize the function of common figures and common

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college-level courses in high school, see: Helen J. Estes, "College Level English in High School," English Journal 47 (1959): 332-34; Murray M. Horowitz, "High School Students in College Courses," High Points 43 (October 1960): 72-74.

<sup>19</sup>CEEB, A Guide, The Advanced Placement Program-1961-62 (New York, 1961), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup>James J. Scanlon, "Student Writing: The Problem and the Solutions-A Committee Reports on the Use of English," Illinois English Bulletin 64 (December 1976-January 1977), p. 1.

literary allusions; to identify the most common literary genres; to be familiar with common terminology of critical and rhetorical analysis; and to know the history of the English language.

Mastery of these skills dictated that senior writing include frequent writing of well-planned, mechanically correct papers on tightly defined topics that provided the student exercises in explaining, finding meanings, organizing thoughts, and analyzing literary texts. The entering freshman must use, rather than simply reproduce, the knowledge of language and literature. One shortcoming of these expectations was the failure to establish the degree of proficiency expected and the means by which these skills were to be acquired. Mostly, the college teachers made freshman composition more flexible rather than helping plan a continuity of the high school and college courses.<sup>21</sup>

One ten year survey, conducted and published in 1963 by a college instructor of future English teachers, sought to determine what was wrong at the high school level. The freshman composition students were asked to anonymously rate their high school English teachers. The results revealed that, although the students were generally kind in their ratings of former teachers, problems in high school English were attributed to (1) too much emphasis on sports, (2) little or no theme writing, (3) no spelling exercises, (4) too little class discipline,

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<sup>21</sup>Gray, pp. 264-65.

(5) grammar rules not applied to writing, (6) too much emphasis on literature, and (7) not enough teacher evaluations of "inside class" themes. <sup>22</sup>

With the proliferation of information encouraging a liaison between high schools and colleges, high schools across the nation began changing courses in English to reach students of average talents. To cite an example, in Portland, Oregon, nine state institutions cooperated with high school teachers and an administrative committee in writing a curriculum for college-bound students at all academic levels. A graduate of this curriculum would have completed the equivalent of an Advanced Placement Program. He would have studied the history of English and works that illustrated structure, characterization, imagery and symbolism; and written expository and analytical papers on topics suggested by the close study of literature and language. Nebraska reported a similar project that extended from Kindergarten to seniors.

The successful history of the cooperative planning between high school and college teachers at Portland and Nebraska influenced the proposals of the 1962 Project English.<sup>23</sup> Inherent in a plan as massive as Project English were problems of ambiguity, sequence, teacher cooperation, ability levels of students, and educational goals of particular school systems. What was

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<sup>22</sup>Irene Brown, "High School English in Retrospect," College Composition and Communication 14 (December 1962) : 254.

<sup>23</sup>For a review of the scope of Project English, see page 11 of this history.

envisioned as producing continuity in English studies from high school to college often produced chaos for the graduates from different schools. However, except for the goal of teaching college students about the history of the English language, the basic responsibilities of the high school and college had not changed over the past thirty years since Campbell's report for NCTE. Project English did, however, propose to "liberate" the high school English teacher from the responsibilities of teaching literature "as documentary evidence for the social science." It also postponed literary history until college, and assigned the entire responsibility for teaching the fundamentals of composition to the high school, specifying that the high school graduate "should be able to express a point of view well, organize a judicious book report, write an interesting biography, and show some knowledge of various stylistic achievements." Again, the problem arose with general wording. Different teachers from diverse environments interpreted the recommendations differently so that articulation was hampered and uncertainly prevailed.<sup>24</sup>

#### PERMISSIVENESS OF 1960's AND EARLY 1970's

Teachers of English at both levels began to take a look at the English textbooks and protest their inadequacy to meet the educational objectives of a student-centered classroom. The stir had begun—weaknesses in textbooks were being proclaimed, teacher competence was being questioned, and methods

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<sup>24</sup>Gray, pp. 267-72.

of teaching were being attacked.<sup>25</sup> The movement toward the permissiveness of the late 60's and the early 70's had begun and was gaining momentum. This period marked a distinct phase in the articulation efforts of colleges and secondary schools. Very few studies were made for articulation purposes; most were on creating writing interest and self-expression, or for devising new and innovative teaching methods to derive this end. It was during this time of revolutionary thinking that the Free Speech Movement proposed in 1964 to free speech, and ultimately writing, from the middle class constraints such as "syntax, the racism of grammar, and the elitism of style." According to the President of Yale, this period saw composition teachers trying to "compress language to a single unambiguous medium of exchange."<sup>26</sup>

Institutions such as Yale, Cornell, Brown, Stanford, the University of Illinois, Keene State College in New Hampshire, Simmons College, and others even eliminated or lowered their courses in basic writing instruction. This movement resulted in a 18 per cent drop in the proportion of colleges requiring freshman English from 1967 to 1974.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, during the late 60's and early 70's schools

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 274. Also see James Lynch and Bertrand Evans, High School English Textbooks (Boston, 1963); James R. Squire, "English at the Crossroads: The National Interest Report Plus Eighteen," English Journal 51 (September 1962): 381-92.

<sup>26</sup>Herbert Bevis, A. Bevis, and others, Report of the Taskforce on Composition (University of Florida, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Arthur Bishop, ed., The Concern for Writing: Focus 5 (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 159 674, 1978), p.3.

placed less emphasis on writing and more on such activities as journalism, theater, film or television criticism.<sup>28</sup> English electives, such as Legal First Aid, Black Dialogue, Still Photography, Mass Media, etc., departed so far from the traditional courses that they could hardly be classified as English.<sup>29</sup> Grammatical structure and mechanics of writing were considered to be too inhibiting for the free thinker and writer.<sup>30</sup> This philosophy was emphasized by Paul Diederick in his 1974 publication, Measuring Growth in Writing:

I believe very strongly that noticing and praising whatever a student does will improve writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly...

Students should be asked to revise only as a matter of self-editing or improving their papers as a natural part of the total writing process, not as a matter of "correcting" things done wrongly.<sup>31</sup>

This is in direct contrast to the opinion expressed earlier by college teachers that "student recognition of incorrect grammatical constructions on standardized tests, application of textbook rules to these errors, and comprehension of grammar vocabulary were essentials to good writing."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>Roger Applebee, and others, Report of the Status of Student Writing in the College (University of Illinois: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1976), p. 34.

<sup>30</sup>Bishop, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup>Paul B. Diederick, Measuring Growth in English (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974), p. 20, quoted in "What Does Research Say About the Teaching of Writing" National Association of Secondary School Principals 62 (October 1978) : 124-26.

<sup>32</sup>Cochrane, p. 166.

At a workshop held for English teachers at the University of Southern Mississippi in 1972, one speaker gave this advice: "Let students enjoy writing and he will pay attention to the mundane matters of spelling and punctuation."<sup>33</sup> At about the same time another college freshman instructor said, "I've come to the point where I'd need to be tortured to give out names of texts and supplemental materials I use in my college courses to a high school senior English teacher."<sup>34</sup>

However, with the rapid decline in writing abilities during these years, a new mood was forming. In Anaheim in 1974, a university instructor hit upon this new mood when he proclaimed, "We've been on a wild drunken binge in teaching composition, and now we're waking up sober the next day. We've let it all hang out and done our own thing too long."<sup>35</sup>

Even Ken McCrorie's Uptaught, published in 1970, with the Third Way was being challenged. Professor Vopat concedes that The Third Way significantly changed teachers' methods of and students approach to writing, but he feels the "student-centered," "knockout" approach leaves the student "empty" for future writing, and further separates him from the consciousness of society and others. Vopat contends that self-expression must encompass more

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<sup>33</sup>Gerald Walton, "Grammar in the English Class," paper presented at the Junior-Senior College English Workshop, Hinds Junior College, Jackson, MS, 5 February 1974.

<sup>34</sup>Burton L. Cox, "The High School English Teacher, the College Freshman Composition Instructor, and Walt Whitman," English Journal 62 (December 1973) : 1246.

<sup>35</sup>Shelley C. Reece, Notes on Taking Risks: A Rough Draft (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 103 871, 1975), p. 2.

than "student outburst" as in Uptaught—it must be a position on values. He defines writing as a "conscious moral activity by which one moves through the self to encompass wider areas of meaning and values." Vopat even quotes some of McCrorie's former students as saying they have lost the initiative to write after finishing the initial Third Way class.<sup>36</sup> To be sure Vopat makes a thought-provoking argument against some of the principles behind the student-centered approach.

#### PRESENT CRISIS IN WRITING

Vopat's voice against uninhibited free-form writing was not alone. Around the nation outcries from parents, educators, students, and even legislators were heard. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), presidents of several leading universities, the Associated Press, and others have researched and published statistics substantiating the "crisis in writing." Just a few facts in the bleak forecast include the steady decline in the verbal scores on the SAT test of 49 points (on a 600 point scale) between 1963 and 1977;<sup>37</sup> the report from the

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<sup>36</sup>James B. Vopat, "Uptaught Rethought—Coming Back from the 'Knockout.'" College English 40 (September 1978): 41-45. (Professor Vopat teaches at Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisc., and served as a member of the 1977 William Coles' NEH seminar on the teaching of writing.) For an interesting rebuttal to Vopat, see: "Comment and Response: A Comment on James Vopat on Ken Macrorie," College English 40 (February 1979): 703-4.

According to McCrorie, the Third Way is to provide the student with freedom to write "truth" as he feels it. The teacher's role is to praise and encourage rather than to correct and condemn.

<sup>37</sup>Bishop, p. 1.

University of California at Berkeley-which draws its enrollment from the top 12.5 percent of high school graduating classes- of a 50 percent increase in remedial English students over the past seven years;<sup>38</sup> and the "virtual consensus" among college faculty members surveyed in 1977 for the Chronicle of Higher Education that freshmen are "seriously underprepared" in the basic skills of written and oral communication.<sup>39</sup> One critic of free-form writing observed that writing has regressed to "a new primitivism with its monosyllabic vocabulary."<sup>40</sup>

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that seventeen year olds' command of writing mechanics declined so much between 1970 and 1974 that only half of them could organize their ideas on paper. Incoherent paragraphs, random sentences, and simple vocabularies dominated their writing, and their revisions were little more than correcting simple mechanical errors.<sup>41</sup> These findings were confirmed in a subsequent study by the Third National Assessment of Educational Progress. This report showed that "10 to 25 percent (of 9, 13, 17-year-olds) display massive problems with written language." There was

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<sup>38</sup>Bevis, p. 1..

<sup>39</sup>Bishop, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup>Bevis, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup>Bishop, pp. 1-2.

even a slight decline in the writing performances of the seventeen year olds.<sup>42</sup>

James Thurber, E. B. White, and other men of literary talents were alarmed for several decades over the declining command of the English language among the so-called "educated" Americans. They pointed out that in the absence of correct models to emulate there will be a general decline in usage among the average writers.<sup>43</sup>

To further complicate progress, reports on composition research yielded "a bewildering mosaic of conflicting findings" on methods of improving writing skills at both the high school and college levels and of mitigating the differences that exist between the two.<sup>44</sup>

John Illo's study, published in 1976, "From Senior to Freshman: A Study of Performance in English Composition in High School and College" did little to bridge the gap. He found that cognitive backgrounds of high school students range greatly and

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<sup>42</sup>"News and the English Profession," English Journal 70 (March 1981): 6.

<sup>43</sup>Bishop, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Betty Bamberg, Composition Instruction Does Make a Difference: A comparison of the High School Preparation of College Freshmen in Regular and Remedial English Classes (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Documents Reproduction Service, ED 140 342, 1976), p. 3.

that there is little consistency or uniformity in the teaching of composition in high school and college.<sup>43</sup> The Committee on the Use of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign reached basically the same conclusions as Illo. Its report reads that very little is known about the "current high school curricula," but attention needs to be addressed to this problem.<sup>44</sup>

Betty Bamberg made a comparative study of college freshman essays written for the Placement Examination and composition instruction at the high schools of the selected freshmen to determine if there were significant instructional differences in the failing and passing students. She concluded that, contrary to the "back to the basics" advocates, grammar instruction, by itself, is not as effective as training in expository writing.<sup>45</sup> She pointed out that expository writing once dominated the high school curriculum, but in recent years, many English teachers have encouraged nonexpository writing by asking the student to explore and shape his personal experience or to experiment with new forms of writing. She feels abandoning the nonexpository writing completely is not the answer; however, she points out

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<sup>43</sup>John Illo, "From Senior to Freshmen: A Study of Performance in English Composition in High School and College," Research in the Teaching of English 10 (Fall 1976): 134.

<sup>44</sup>Scanlon, pp. 2-3.

<sup>45</sup>Betty Bamberg, Composition Basics For College Preparation Students (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Documents Reproduction Service, ED 149 351, 1977), pp. 3-10.

that since college writing is almost exclusively expository, the college preparatory student needs adequate practice in expository writing.<sup>46</sup>

In a survey confirming other findings that high school and college teaching of composition differ in their emphasis, a communications professor from Yeshiva University in New York used the seven basic approaches to instruction- form, thematic, grammatical, processes, creative, rhetorical, and psychological- for his study. He discovered that both levels dealt first with form, but each varied widely in its second and third approaches to instruction. In high schools, the thematic approach was second, with the grammatical emphasis ranking third. In contrast, college teachers stressed the processes-narration, description, expository, and argumentative-second, with the creative approach ranking third. Yet, both levels ranked the psychological approach as being the ideal one. <sup>47</sup>

Standardization of English at either level is not viewed as desirable by some present-day composition instructors. Prompted by the publication of the 1976 SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English of NCTE) guidelines on minimal competence, J. F. Kobler states that no organization, regardless of usefulness "can establish meaningful nationwide, statewide, or

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<sup>46</sup>Bamberg, Composition Instruction Does Make a Difference, pp. 16-20.

<sup>47</sup>Solomon S. Simonson, "The Teaching of Composition," English Journal 35 (April 1966): 472-76.

even local standards of competency or minimum performance."<sup>48</sup>

Amid the controversy of what method or approach is best for improving writing skills and which research findings are most accurate, back-to-the-basic textbooks are being published in staggering numbers; minimal competencies are being set; "The Right-To-" groups are protesting; and new committees and taskforces are being formed to make new recommendations.

The Council for Basic Education recently formed a commission, funded by the National Endowment of Humanities, to investigate the writing crisis and publish the results, which it did.<sup>49</sup> Paul Diederick was commissioned in 1977 by the Educational Testing Service to devise a reliable composition Scale. His findings have been released and further confirm the disparity between writing emphasis of high school and college teachers.<sup>50</sup> The 1981 President of NCTE has the Commission on Curriculum busy on a draft of "The Essentials of English,"<sup>51</sup> this year's theme. Although no articles on articulation between high school and college composition are in the last two years of the English Journal, some progress is being made.

To alleviate the hostility that had developed between

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<sup>48</sup>J. F. Kobler, "Departmental Standards in Freshman Composition," College Composition and Communication 29 (October 1978) : 264-66.

<sup>49</sup>Bishop, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>Paul B. Diederick, Definitions of Ratings on the-ETS Composition Scale (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 145 454, 1977), pp. 1-4.

<sup>51</sup>Robert Squires, "Squires Calls for Effort to Sustain The Essentials," English Journal 70 (January 1981): 89.

the local high school and college faculties over who was "To blame" for the writing problems of the entering freshmen, Queens College conducted a very successful project in 1978-79 that holds promise for other schools. The college provided a writing laboratory, staffed by graduate students who gave one hour free tutoring to each student during his senior year. Both levels agree that the plan is working.<sup>52</sup>

Another very informative study of writing abilities and problems of students transferring from high school to first year composition was completed in 1978 by the University of Florida task force. The study included students, high school English teachers, department chairmen, language-arts supervisors, college teachers and department chairmen, and the State Department of Education Language Arts Consultant. The problems were identified and divided into two divisions: instruction and curriculum. The following items were identified as specific problem areas underlying smooth transition from senior composition to freshman composition:

In Instruction

1. Some teachers of writing can not write well themselves.
2. They may have had little or no instruction in teaching writing.
3. They may not have had instruction in traditional English grammar.

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<sup>52</sup>Betsy B. Kaufman, "Middle School-High School-College: A Description of a Project That Worked" (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 179 981, 1979), pp. 2-8.

4. English classes may be taught by uncertified or unqualified teachers.
5. Instruction time for composition is hampered by the teaching loads and other activities of the teachers.

#### In Curriculum

6. Competing grammars-tradition, transformational, structural, generative, etc.- leaves the student and teacher without a common vocabulary for discussing writing.
7. Because of the elective system, students may avoid courses that require reading and writing.
8. When written entrance exams were eliminated for college entrance, high schools deemphasised writing.
9. The legislatively mandated credit for College Level Examination Program examinations (CLEP) at the 50th percentile allowed many students to skip freshman composition and put in jeopardy the Advanced Placement Program in high schools.
10. The decline in writing assignments in all academic fields contributes to the attrition of writing skills in college juniors.<sup>53</sup>

Recommendations for alleviating the writing deficiencies of high school students before they enter freshmen composition classes include these points:

1. a writing training program for prospective and in-service high school teachers.<sup>54</sup>
2. a decrease in teaching loads for high school English teachers. (NCTE recommends a maximum student load of 100 per week)

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<sup>53</sup>Bevis, pp. 3-4.

<sup>54</sup>With the increased number of teachers available, the four-step process for selecting a teacher for a specific position may follow the format set forth by Jo Pettigrew, "The Art of Selecting A Language Arts Teacher," condensed from Catalyst for Change 9 (Spring 1980); 15-17, in Education Digest 46 (September 1980):56-63.

3. writing coursework as a recertification requirement.
4. stricter English admission requirements at the university level.
5. an equal concentration of school districts toward both marginal and college-preparatory students.<sup>55</sup>

The taskforce also made recommendations to be implemented at the university level:

1. inform high schools of the performance of their students' work in freshmen composition.
2. grade sets of high school papers from college-preparatory English classes to acquaint the students with college standards.
3. teach occasional classes at high schools.
4. require 4 English credits for college entrance, with one year each: grammar and expository writing, English literature, American literature, world literature.
5. raise the cutoff score or disallow the CLEP credit. Use the Advanced Placement Program, which is far superior for college-preparatory students, for exemptions from freshmen composition.
6. require a placement test, objective and written, of all entering freshmen.
7. test all students again at the beginning of their junior year with both an objective and essay test.

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<sup>55</sup>For an interesting article on how to teach college-bound and noncollege-bound students writing and reading in the same class by using "relevant" books and topics, consult Susan Ohanian, "Reading for What?" English Journal 70 (January 1981): 25-30. (Most of the recommendations of the Florida Taskforce and the "methods" in the current journals are restatements of an earlier time.)

8. require a standard in writing in every discipline.

9. provide a writing laboratory with trained staff to deal with specific weaknesses.<sup>56</sup>

The Florida Taskforce has undertaken an enormous task—of reversing the damage resulting from the permissiveness of the late 60's and early 70's; of refuting the pervasive attitude that the written word is not as important as it once was; of countering the influence of television and political jargon of <sup>57</sup> the 80's; and of reestablishing liaison between the high school and college composition courses. Perhaps the groundwork has been laid for other schools across the nation to follow. According to A. Bartlett Giamatti, President of Yale, our generation must not lose our powers to write, for in so doing we lose our past and future:

I believe that all of us are what we say we are—that as individuals and as a people we define through language what we have, and what we will be, and that a group of people who cannot clearly and precisely speak and write will never be a genuine society. We shape ourselves and our institutions, and we and our institutions are shaped, through those individual acts of negotiation between ourselves and our language. Without respect for its awesome power we can never find out

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<sup>56</sup>Levis, pp. 4-14.

<sup>57</sup>Bishop, p. 4.

who we are, and thus never have to leave the child's garden of feeling and enter the city—that is, become citizens. . . . Language is the medium in which the race lives, it is what we have brought from our past, and it is what has brought us from our past—our link with who we are and who we want to be.<sup>58</sup>

The history of articulation between high school and college composition courses reveals the many pitfalls and shortcomings the efforts have encountered. It, likewise, emphasizes the need for a positive program to strengthen the liaison between the two levels of instruction. One of the major problems in developing such a program is defining the expectations of composition teachers at both high school and college levels. Investigating which writing problems these teachers perceive as most serious is one starting point for creating smoother transition between the high school and college composition courses.

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<sup>58</sup> Bevis, p. 16.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE STUDY

This study investigated the most serious composition problems as perceived by Mississippi high school senior English teachers and college freshmen composition instructors.

All thirty-four of the Mississippi colleges (junior colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities) offering freshman composition in a degree program were included in the study.

A random sample of the 297 Mississippi high schools (public, private, and parochial) was made in order to have a manageable number. Thirty-four high schools were chosen. This matched the number of colleges included in the study.

The addresses of the colleges were obtained from a directory of Mississippi colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> Lists of the high schools and their addresses were obtained from the State Department of Education and from the Mississippi Private School Association. The separate lists of high schools were alphabetized into one list from which the thirty-four high schools were selected, using a table of random numbers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A Directory of Mississippi Colleges and Universities, Institute of Higher Learning, Jackson, MS.

<sup>2</sup>Table of 105,000 Random Decimal Digits, Statement No. 4914, File No. 261-A-1, Interstate Commerce Commission, Washington, D.C., May 1949, p. 1.

It had been agreed in advance to accept no less than a 50 percent response rate from either group of respondents- high school or college.

#### THE INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire was adapted from Thomas Newkirk, Thomas Cameron, and Cynthia Selfe's instrument designed to study freshmen writing abilities (Permission to use this instrument was requested in a letter addressed to Thomas Newkirk, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824). The questionnaire measured serious writing weaknesses as perceived by teachers at the University of Texas at Austin. It consisted of forty-one statements describing common writing problems. The Texas respondents were asked to make two judgments per statement:

(1) They were asked to agree or disagree that the statement was a writing problem, using a scale of one (strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree).

(2) They were asked to rate the seriousness of the problem on a scale of one (serious problem) to seven (no problem).<sup>3</sup>

Because of the complexity of the questionnaire used in the Texas study (which received a 49 percent response rate), the questionnaire for this study was modified:

(1) The forty-one statements were reduced to thirty.

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Newkirk, Thomas Cameron, and Cynthia Selfe, "What Johnny Can't Write: A University View: Freshman Writing Ability," *English Journal* 66 (November 1977): 65-69. (Dr. Newkirk coordinated the Univ. of Texas study. For this reason the letter of request was sent to him.)

Questionnaire on Student Writing Problems

Among

High School Seniors  
and  
College Freshmen

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|                                                                                                                          |                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <u>School</u>                                                                                                            | <u>Name of person completing questionnaire</u> |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>Sex</u>                                     |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>Age</u>                                     |
| Bachelor Masters AAA Specialist PhD---- Education Completed (Please circle)                                              |                                                |
| Number of years experience in teaching composition to:                                                                   |                                                |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>High School Seniors</u>                     |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>College Freshmen</u>                        |
| Number of classes presently teaching:                                                                                    |                                                |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>High School Seniors</u>                     |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>College Freshmen</u>                        |
| Do you feel your college preparation in composition prepared you for your present teaching assignment?                   |                                                |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>yes</u>                                     |
|                                                                                                                          | <u>no</u>                                      |
| After completing the questionnaire, if you have any comments that could contribute to this study, please use this space. |                                                |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                    |                                                |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                    |                                                |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                    |                                                |

The information obtained from this page will be kept confidential.  
Thank you.

Based on your experience in teaching composition to either high school seniors or college freshmen, please rate these writing problems.

SA = Strongly agree  
A = Agree  
? = Not sure whether I agree or disagree  
D = Disagree  
SD = Strongly Disagree

| SA  | A   | ?   | D   | SD  | Writing Problems                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.                                                                                              |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                     |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 3. Students are unable to organize their information into unified paragraphs.                                                                                           |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 4. Students do not use the principles of deductive logic to draw their conclusions.                                                                                     |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 5. Students weaken their sentences by using the passive voice and by beginning their sentences with "There is" or "It is,..."                                           |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 6. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.                                                                                    |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 7. Students fail to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences.                                                                                               |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 8. Students automatically assume that their audience agrees with their value systems (e.g., They may assume that just to label an idea "socialist" is to discredit it.) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 9. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 10. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraphs to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                    |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 11. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.                                                                                                         |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 12. Students cannot write in a formal objective style (i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes into the writing.)                                                   |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 13. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.                                                                                                      |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 14. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials—Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.                                             |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 15. Students do not revise their first draft.                                                                                                                           |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 16. Students fail to proofread their papers.                                                                                                                            |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 17. Students do not enjoy writing.                                                                                                                                      |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 18. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.                                                                                                                      |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 19. Students cannot outline formally.                                                                                                                                   |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 20. Students write sentence fragments.                                                                                                                                  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 21. Students write run-on sentences.                                                                                                                                    |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 22. Students overuse clichés.                                                                                                                                           |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 23. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.                                                                                                                     |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 24. Students do not know how to write a term paper.                                                                                                                     |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 25. Students use inflated language.                                                                                                                                     |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 26. Students do not know grammatical terminology.                                                                                                                       |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 27. Students are poor spellers.                                                                                                                                         |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 28. Students overuse commas.                                                                                                                                            |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 29. Students underuse commas.                                                                                                                                           |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 30. Students are poor at capitalization.                                                                                                                                |

This was accomplished by screening the forty-one statements and combining all those that contained overlapping writing problems.

(2) The respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of the writing problems, using a scale of one (strongly agree) to five (strongly disagree).

A coversheet was affixed to the questionnaire requesting certain demographic information to be used to better understand the respondents to this study and to construct a profile of the freshman composition instructor and the senior English teacher. The information requested identification of the respondent and the school represented, plus age, sex, educational background, years of experience, and number of classes presently teaching. The respondents were given space to comment on their own college preparation in composition, their preception of the need of this study, or any other information they wished to contribute. Confidentiality was promised. (See Appendix I for a copy of the letters of transmittal.)

## ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data for this study was conducted in this order:

1. After the responses to the questionnaire were received, they were separated into secondary responses and college responses.

### High School Responses

2. Beginning with the high school responses, the demographic information was tallied and arranged into manageable tables. The tables were constructed as follows:

- a) Age and sex were listed in one table. Age was divided into ten year intervals for ease of reading.

- b) Educational background was given in one table because five degrees were listed.

- c) One table combined the years of teaching experience and the number of classes presently teaching. The means of each of these items were computed and shown separately for (1) the number of years of experience teaching high school senior English, (2) the number of years of experience teaching college composition, if any, (3) the number of classes presently teaching of high school senior English, and (4) the number of classes, if any, of college composition presently teaching.

- d) One table was constructed to show the respondents' opinion on their college preparation in composition in preparing them for their present teaching assignment.

3. The responses to the thirty writing problems were tallied and the means computed.

4. The means were computed by using the following pre-assigned values for the rating scale:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Not sure whether I agree or disagree
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

5. The thirty writing problems were ranked from 1-30, based on the mean of each writing problem ( the lower the mean, the higher the rank). This ranking reflected the most serious writing problems as perceived by the high school senior English teachers.

6. Tables were constructed to list the rank and mean of each of the thirty writing problems.

7. For ease of reading and discussing, the ranks of the thirty writing problems were dividied into three tables: upper 33 percent, middle 33 percent, and lowest 33 percent.

8. For discussion purposes, the top one third was referred to as the most serious writing problems; the middle one third, as serious writing problems; and the lowest one third, as the least serious writing problems.

#### College Responses

The last seven steps enumerated above were repeated for the college responses.

The conclusions began with a profile of the high school and college respondents to the study with data from the tables presenting the background information.

Since this study was an investigation of the most serious writing problems as perceived by high school senior English teachers and college freshman composition instructors in an attempt to help smooth transition of high school students from senior English to college composition, it was necessary (1) to analyze the most serious problems as perceived by the high school senior English teachers, (2) to analyze the most serious problems as perceived by college freshman composition instructors, and (3) to compare the most serious writing problems as perceived by both high school and college respondents. In comparing these, both similarities and disparities were noted.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA AND CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the most serious composition problems as perceived by high school senior English teachers and college freshman composition instructors.

Analysis of the questionnaire data was begun by tallying the demographic information and arranging it into tables. This background information for the high school respondents appears in Tables 1-4; for the college respondents, in Tables 8-11. Next, the responses to the thirty writing problems were tallied and ranked from 1 to 30, according to mean values. For ease of reading and discussing, the ranks were divided into three tables: the upper 33 percent, the middle 33 percent, and the lowest 33 percent.

Of the sample of thirty-four high school senior English teachers, thirty (85.7 percent) responded to the questionnaire. The three tables covering their responses to the writing problems are Tables 5-7.

Twenty-four (70.6 percent) of the thirty-four college freshman composition instructors responded to the questionnaire. The three tables covering their responses to the writing problems are Tables 12-14.

Table 1 shows the age and sex of the high school respondents. Age is divided into ten year intervals for ease of reading. In order of frequency, eleven of the respondents were aged 30-39;

six were aged 40-49; five were aged 50-59; three were aged 20-29, and one was over 60. Four of the respondents did not mark age on the coversheet. The predominant age for the high school respondents was in the thirties.

The high school respondents were predominantly female-29 to 1, or 97 percent.

TABLE 1  
AGE AND SEX OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONDENTS

|                      | AGE  |       |       |       |       |     | SEX |   |
|----------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|---|
|                      | N.A. | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | F   | M |
| Number of Responses  | 4    | 3     | 11    | 6     | 5     | 1   | 29  | 1 |
| Percent of Responses | 13   | 10    | 37    | 20    | 17    | 3   | 97  | 3 |

Table 2 shows the highest educational degree completed by the high school respondents. Most of the respondents (13) had completed master's degrees; six had bachelor's degrees, two held AAA certificates; and two had specialist degrees. Seven of the respondents did not answer this item on the questionnaire. A master's degree was the predominant degree held by the high school respondents, accounting for 43 percent.

TABLE 2

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL DEGREE COMPLETED  
BY HIGH SCHOOL RESPONDENTS

| Degree or Certificate | No. of Respondents | Percent |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Bachelor's            | 6                  | 20      |
| Master's              | 13                 | 43      |
| AAA7                  | 2                  | 7       |
| Specialist            | 2                  | 7       |
| Ph.D                  | 0                  | 0       |
| No Answer             | 7                  | 23      |
| Total                 | 30                 | 100     |

Table 3 shows the following background information:

- 1) the average number of years experience the high school English teachers have in teaching senior English,
- 2) the average number of years experience the high school English teachers have in teaching college composition,
- 3) the average number of senior English classes the high school English teachers are presently teaching, and
- 4) the average number of classes of college freshman composition the high school English teachers are presently teaching.

The average number of years experience in teaching high school senior English was 11.23 for the senior English teachers. Many of these teachers had previous experience in teaching college freshman composition; this experience averaged 1.52 years.

The average number of senior English classes being taught by the high school respondents was 2.37. Two high school teachers were teaching a night class of college freshman composition, which accounts for the average of .067 classes of college composition.

TABLE 3

HIGH SCHOOL RESPONDENTS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE  
AND CLASSES PRESENTLY TEACHING  
(IN MEANS)

|                         | Years of Teaching Experience |                         | Classes presently Teaching |                         |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
|                         | H.S. seniors<br>(1)          | college freshmen<br>(2) | H.S. seniors<br>(3)        | College freshmen<br>(4) |
| Senior English Teachers | 11.23                        | 1.23                    | 2.37                       | .067                    |

(See Appendix III for numbers from which the means were obtained.)

Table 4 shows how the high school respondents felt about their college composition work in preparing them for their present teaching assignment. Twenty-three of the respondents did not feel their preparation was adequate; seven felt it was adequate.

TABLE 4

HIGH SCHOOL RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS  
ON COLLEGE PREPARATION  
IN COMPOSITION

|                                                                                      | Yes | %  | No | %  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|----|----|
| Did your college preparation in composition prepare you for your present assignment? | 7   | 23 | 23 | 77 |

Table 5 shows the ten most serious writing problems as perceived by the high school respondents. These ten writing problems are in ranked order as to their seriousness as perceived by the high school senior English teachers. The

writing problems falling within ranks 1-10 are as follows:

1. Students fail to proofread their papers.
2. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
3. Students cannot write in a formal objective style(i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes into writing.)
4. Students do not enjoy writing.
5. Students fail to use transition to develop coherence.
6. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.
7. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.
8. Students are poor spellers.
9. Students do not use deductive logic to draw conclusions.
10. Students write run-on sentences.

TABLE 5

RANK AND MEAN OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES  
(UPPER 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                    | Mean  | Rank |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------|------|
| 16        | failure to proofread           | 1.47  | 1    |
| 1         | failure to provide details     | 1.66  | 2    |
| 12        | cannot write formal, objective | 1.8   | 3    |
| 17        | do not enjoy writing           | 1.828 | 4    |
| 2         | do not use transitions         | 1.83  | 5.5  |
| 23        | failure to limit topics        | 1.83  | 5.5  |
| 18        | sentence patterns not varied   | 1.86  | 7    |
| 27        | poor spellers                  | 1.9   | 8    |
| 4         | deductive logic not used       | 1.95  | 9    |
| 21        | write run-on sentences         | 2.03  | 10   |

Table 6 shows the middle 33 percent of the writing problems as perceived by the high school respondents. These ten writing problems are in ranked order as to their seriousness as perceived by the senior English teachers. Following is a list of the middle one third (ranks 11-26) of the writing problems:

1. Students fail to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences.
2. Students are unable to organize their information into unified paragraphs.
3. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.
4. Students weaken their sentences by using the passive voice and by beginning their sentences with "There is..." or "It is..."
5. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraphs to develop paragraph coherence.
6. Students cannot outline formally.
7. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.
8. Students do not revise their first draft.
9. Students write sentence fragments.
10. Students overuse commas.

TABLE 6

RANK AND MEAN OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES  
(MIDDLE 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                      | Mean  | Rank |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| 7         | do not write complex sentences   | 2.06  | 11   |
| 3         | do not write unified paragraphs  | 2.1   | 12   |
| 6         | deductive logic not used         | 2.138 | 13   |
| 5         | passive voice and weak beginning | 2.23  | 14   |
| 10        | do not write clincher sentence   | 2.25  | 15   |
| 19        | cannot outline                   | 2.33  | 16   |
| 15        | do not revise 1st draft          | 2.36  | 18   |
| 9         | word repetitions not used        | 2.36  | 18   |
| 20        | write sentence fragments         | 2.36  | 18   |
| 28        | overuse commas                   | 2.4   | 20   |

Table 7 shows the lowest 33 percent of the writing problems as perceived by the high school respondents. These ten writing problems are in ranked order as to their seriousness as perceived by the secondary English teachers. Following is a list of the bottom one third (ranks 21-30) of the writing problems:

1. Students overuse cliches.
2. Students automatically assume that their audience agrees with their value systems (e.g., They may assume that just to label an idea "socialist" is to discredit it.)
3. Students do not know how to write a term paper.
4. Students do not know grammatical terminology.
5. Students underuse commas.
6. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials-Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.
7. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.
8. Students use inflated language.
9. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.
10. Students are poor at capitalization.

TABLE 7.

RANK AND MEAN OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES  
(LOWEST 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                    | Mean | Rank |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------|------|
| 22        | uses cliches                   | 2.43 | 21   |
| 8         | thinks audience always agrees  | 2.53 | 22   |
| 24        | cannot write term papers       | 2.73 | 23.5 |
| 26        | do not know grammatical terms  | 2.73 | 23.5 |
| 29        | underuse commas                | 2.79 | 25   |
| 14        | cannot use reference materials | 2.8  | 26   |
| 11        | no topic sentence              | 2.9  | 27   |
| 25        | use inflated language          | 3.03 | 28   |
| 13        | do not know topics             | 3.1  | 29   |
| 30        | poor capitalization            | 3.5  | 30   |

Table 8 shows the age and sex of the college respondents. Age is divided into ten year intervals for ease of reading. Five of the twenty-four respondents did not answer age. Of the remaining nineteen respondents who indicated age, ten were aged 30-39; 4 were 40-49; two were 50-59, and three were over 60. The predominate age group for the college respondents was in the thirties.

There were fifteen female (62.5 percent) and nine male (37.5 percent) college instructors.

TABLE 8  
AGE AND SEX OF COLLEGE RESPONDENTS

|                      | Age  |       |       |       |       |     | Sex  |      |
|----------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|
|                      | N.A. | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | F    | M    |
| Number of Responses  | 5    | 0     | 10    | 4     | 2     | 3   | 15   | 9    |
| Percent of Responses | 21   | 0     | 42    | 17    | 8     | 12  | 62.5 | 37.5 |

Table 9 shows the highest educational degree completed by the college respondents. Nine had completed master's degrees: two had AAA certificates; three had specialist degrees; and eight had Ph.D degrees. The number of respondents holding master's degrees and Ph.D degrees were almost equal. Two subjects did not respond to this item. No questionnaires were completed by instructors having only a bachelor's degree; therefore it is assumed that the Chairmen of the English Depart-

ments did not direct the questionnaire to any of the graduate teachers of freshman composition, although this was not requested on the questionnaire.

TABLE 9  
HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL DEGREE COMPLETED  
BY COLLEGE RESPONDENTS

| Degree or Certificate | No. of Respondents | Percent |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Bachelor's            | 0                  | 0       |
| Master's              | 9                  | 37.5    |
| AAA                   | 2                  | 8.0     |
| Specialist            | 3                  | 12.5    |
| Ph.D                  | 8                  | 33.0    |
| No Answer             | 2                  | 8.0     |
| Total                 | 24                 | 100     |

Table 10 shows the following background information:

1) the average number of years of experience the college respondents have in teaching college freshman composition.

2) the average number of years the college respondents have previously taught high school senior English.

3) the average number of classes of college freshman composition the college respondents are presently teaching.

4) the average number of classes, if any, the college respondents are presently teaching of high school senior English.

As shown in Table 10, the college respondents had an average of 12.3 years experience in teaching college freshmen

composition. Many of these instructors had previous experience in teaching high school senior English; this experience averaged 4.25 years.

The average number of classes of college freshman composition the college instructors are presently teaching was 2.59. Only one college respondent indicated he was presently teaching classes of both high school senior English and college freshman composition.

TABLE 10

COLLEGE RESPONDENTS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE  
AND CLASSES PRESENTLY TEACHING  
(IN MEANS)

|                      | Years of Teaching Experience |                     | Classes presently Teaching |                     |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
|                      | College freshmen<br>(1)      | H.S. seniors<br>(2) | College freshmen<br>(3)    | H.S. seniors<br>(4) |
| Freshman Instructors | 12.5                         | 4.25                | 2.59                       | .17                 |

(See Appendix III for numbers from which the means were obtained.)

Table 11 reflects the college respondents' opinions on how well their college preparation in composition prepared them for their present teaching assignment. There was an even split in their opinions. Eleven indicated their preparation was adequate; eleven indicated it was not. Two college respondents did not answer this question.

TABLE 11

COLLEGE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS  
ON COLLEGE PREPARATION  
IN COMPOSITION

|                                                                                      | yes | %    | no | %    | NA | %   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|----|------|----|-----|
| Did your college preparation in composition prepare you for your present assignment? | 11  | 45.8 | 11 | 45.8 | 2  | 8.4 |

Table 12 shows the top ten most serious writing problems as perceived by the college respondents. These ten writing problems are in ranked order as to their seriousness as perceived by the freshman composition instructors. Following is a list of the upper one third (ranks 1-10\* of the writing problems:

1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.
3. Students are poor spellers.
4. Students overuse cliches.
5. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.
6. Students fail to proofread their papers.
7. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.
8. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraph to develop coherence.
9. Students cannot write in a formal objective style(i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes their writing.)
10. Students do not enjoy writing.

TABLE 12

RANK AND MEAN OF COLLEGE RESPONDENTS  
(UPPER 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                    | Mean  | Rank |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1         | do not use supporting detail's | 1.416 | 1    |
| 2         | do not use transitions         | 1.66  | 2    |
| 27        | poor spellers                  | 1.83  | 3    |
| 22        | overuse cliches                | 2.0   | 4    |
| 16        | do not proofread papers        | 2.04  | 6    |
| 6         | do not use inductive logic     | 2.04  | 6    |
| 23        | do not limit topics            | 2.04  | 6    |
| 10        | no clincher sentence           | 2.083 | 9    |
| 12        | cannot write formal objective  | 2.083 | 9    |
| 17        | do not enjoy writing           | 2.083 | 9    |

Table 13 shows the middle 33 percent of the writing problems as perceived by the college respondents. These ten writing problems are in ranked order as to their seriousness as perceived by the college freshman composition instructors. Following is a list of the middle one third (ranks 11-20) of the writing problems:

1. Students are unable to organize their information into unified statements.
2. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.
3. Students do not use the principles of deductive logic to draw their conclusions.
4. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.
5. Students write run-on sentences.
6. Students do not know how to write a term paper.
7. Students overuse commas.
8. Students cannot outline formally.
9. Students automatically assume that their audience agrees with their value systems (e.g., They may assume that to label an idea "socialist" is to discredit it.)
10. Students write sentence fragments.

TABLE 13  
RANK AND MEAN OF COLLEGE RESPONDENTS  
(MIDDLE 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                     | Mean  | Rank |
|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|
| 3         | do not write unified paragraphs | 2.125 | 11.5 |
| 9         | do not use word repetitions     | 2.125 | 11.5 |
| 4         | deductive logic not used        | 2.16  | 15   |
| 18        | sentence patterns not varied    | 2.16  | 15   |
| 21        | write run-on sentences          | 2.16  | 15   |
| 24        | cannot write term papers        | 2.16  | 15   |
| 28        | overuse commas                  | 2.16  | 15   |
| 19        | cannot outline                  | 2.2   | 18   |
| 8         | thinks audience always agrees   | 2.25  | 19   |
| 20        | writes sentence fragments       | 2.26  | 20   |

Table 14 shows the ten writing problems that ranked in the lowest one third of the thirty writing problems. These problems were perceived by the college freshman composition instructors to be the least serious writing problems in freshman composition. The writing problems falling within ranks 21-30 are as follows:

1. Students do not know grammatical terminology.
2. Students do not revise their first draft.
3. Students fail to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences.
4. Students weaken their sentences by using the passive voice and by beginning their sentence with "There is" or "It is..."

5. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.
6. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials-Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.
7. Students use inflated language.
8. Students overuse commas.
9. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.
10. Students underuse commas.

TABLE 14

RANK AND MEAN OF COLLEGE RESPONDENTS  
(LOWEST 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                      | Mean  | Rank |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| 26        | do not know grammar terms        | 2.3   | 21   |
| 15        | do not revise first draft        | 2.375 | 22   |
| 7         | do not write complex sentences   | 2.39  | 23   |
| 5         | passive voice and weak beginning | 2.416 | 24   |
| 11        | no topic sentences               | 2.6   | 25   |
| 14        | cannot use reference materials   | 2.708 | 26   |
| 25        | use inflated language            | 3.0   | 27   |
| 30        | overuse commas                   | 3.125 | 28   |
| 13        | do not know topics               | 3.25  | 29   |
| 29        | underuse commas                  | 3.27  | 30   |

Table 15 shows the ranks of the upper 33 percent of the high school responses as compared to the ranks of the upper 33 percent of the college responses. The high school senior English teachers agreed with the college freshman composition instructors on seven writing problems as being most serious.

These are as follows:

1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence
3. Students cannot write in a formal objective style.
4. Students fail to proofread their papers.
5. Students do not enjoy writing.
6. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.
7. Students are poor spellers.

TABLE 15  
RANK OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES AS COMPARED  
TO COLLEGE RESPONSES  
(UPPER 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                    | college<br>rank | H.S.,<br>rank |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1         | do not use supporting details  | 1               | 2             |
| 2         | do not use transitions         | 2               | 5.5           |
| 27        | poor spellers                  | 3               | 8             |
| 22        | overuse cliches                | 4               | C*            |
| 16        | do not proofread papers        | 6               | 1             |
| 6         | do not use inductive logic     | 6               | 0*            |
| 23        | do not limit topics            | 6               | 5.5           |
| 10        | no clincher sentence           | 9               | 0*            |
| 12        | cannot write formal obj. style | 9               | 3             |
| 17        | do not enjoy writing           | 9               | 4             |

\*These writing problems did not rank in the upper 33 percent of the high school responses.

Table 16 shows the middle 33 percent of the high school responses compared to the middle 33 percent of the college responses. The college and high school English teachers agreed on five writing problems as falling in ranks 11-20:

1. Students are unable to organize their information into unified statements.
2. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.
3. Students overuse commas.
4. Students cannot outline formally.
5. Students write sentence fragments.

TABLE 16

RANK OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES AS COMPARED  
TO COLLEGE RESPONSES  
(MIDDLE 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                     | college rank | H.S. rank |
|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| 3         | do not write unified paragraphs | 11.5         | 12        |
| 9         | do not use word repetitions     | 11.5         | 18        |
| 4         | deductive logic not used        | 15           | 0*        |
| 18        | sentence patterns not varied    | 15           | 0*        |
| 21        | write run-on sentences          | 15           | 0*        |
| 24        | cannot write term papers        | 15           | 0*        |
| 28        | overuse commas                  | 15           | 20        |
| 19        | cannot outline                  | 18           | 16*       |
| 8         | thinks audience always agrees   | 19           | 0         |
| 20        | writes sentence fragments       | 20           | 18        |

\*These writing problems did not rank in the middle 33 percent of the high school responses.

Table 17 shows the lowest 33 percent of the high school responses as compared to the lowest 33 percent of the college responses. The high school senior English teachers and freshman college composition instructors agreed on seven writing problems as being least serious. They are as follows:

1. Students do not know grammatical terminology.
2. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.
3. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials- Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.
4. Students use inflated language.
5. Students overuse commas.
6. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.
7. Students underuse commas.

TABLE 17

RANK OF HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES AS COMPARED  
TO COLLEGE RESPONSES  
( LOWER 33 PERCENT)

| Statement | Description                      | College<br>rank | H.S.<br>rank |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 26        | do not know grammar terms        | 21              | 23.5         |
| 15        | do not revise first draft        | 22              | 0*           |
| 7         | do not write complex sentences   | 23              | C*           |
| 5         | passive voice and weak beginning | 24              | C*           |
| 11        | no topic sentence                | 25              | 27           |
| 14        | cannot use reference materials   | 26              | 26           |
| 25        | use inflated language            | 27              | 28           |
| 30        | overuse commas                   | 28              | 30           |
| 13        | do not know topics               | 29              | 29           |
| 29        | underuse commas                  | 30              | 25           |

\*These writing problems did not rank in the lowest 33 percent of the high school responses

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the tables presenting the background information about the respondents to this study produced some informative conclusions.

The profile of the high school senior English teacher is overwhelmingly female (97 percent); 37 percent are aged 30-39; 43 percent have master's degrees; they average 11.23 years experience teaching senior English and have taught an average of 1.52 years of college freshman composition. The number of classes of senior English presently teaching averages 2.37.

The profile of the college freshman composition instructor is 64 percent female; 42 percent are aged 30-39; 37.5 percent have master's degrees; and they have taught college freshman composition for an average of 12.5 years. Their previous experience in teaching high school senior English classes averages 4.25 years. The number of freshman composition classes presently teaching averages 2.59.

Seventy-seven percent of the high school respondents indicated their college preparation in composition did not adequately prepare them to teach senior English. The college respondents were split (50-50 percent) on the adequacy of their individual college preparation in composition. When the 77 percent high school respondents and the 50 percent college respondents are considered as one group, 63 percent of these 1981 Mississippi English instructors of college freshman composition and high school senior English teachers concurred on this point.

Since this study was an investigation of the most serious writing problems as perceived by high school senior English teachers and college freshmen composition instructors in an attempt to help smooth transition of high school students from senior English to college composition, the analysis of the data will follow this order: (1) analysis of the most serious problems as perceived by high school English teachers, (2) analysis of the most serious problems as perceived by college composition instructors, and (3) comparing the most serious writing problems as perceived by both high school and college respondents.

The high school senior English teachers rated the following ten writing problems as the most serious:

1. Students fail to proofread their papers.
2. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
3. Students cannot write in a formal objective style (i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes into writing.)
4. Students do not enjoy writing.
5. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.
6. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.
7. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.
8. Students are poor spellers.
9. Students do not use the principles of deductive logic to draw their conclusions.
10. Students write run-on sentences.

The college freshmen composition instructors rated the following ten writing problems as the most serious:

1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.
3. Students are poor spellers.
4. Students overuse clichés.
5. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.

6. Students fail to proofread their papers.
7. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.
8. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraphs to develop coherence.
9. Students cannot write in a formal objective style (i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes their writing.)
10. Students do not enjoy writing.

By comparing the top ten writing problems (upper 33 percent) as perceived by the high school respondents with the top ten writing problems (upper 33 percent) as perceived by the college respondents, one may conclude that seven of the writing problems were agreed upon as being most serious by both levels of respondents. They are as follows:

1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.
2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.
3. Students cannot write in a formal objective style.
4. Students fail to proofread their papers.
5. Students do not enjoy writing.
6. Students fail to adequately limit their papers.
7. Students are poor spellers.

Furthermore, not one of the writing problems in the upper 33 percent had the same rank, which reflected the seriousness of the problem as perceived by the respondents. For example, failing to provide details for generalized statements was ranked one by the college respondents and two by the high school respondents. These differences in ranks of the writing problems reflect the disparity that exists between the high school and college English teachers in agreeing on which writing problems are to be treated most seriously in a student's composition.

An examination of the writing problems in the middle 33 percent (Table 16) reveals that there was general disagreement between the high school and the college respondents on which writing problems belonged in the middle 33 percent. Only five of the writing problems were agreed on by both high school and college respondents.

The most agreement between the high school and college respondents was on the writing problems they perceived to be least serious writing problems. These were in the lowest 33 percent of the ranks (Table 17). The respondents agreed on seven writing problems as being least serious, six of these ranking from 25-30.

Thus far the analysis of the data has dealt with the rank of each statement. Among the thirty high school respondents and the twenty-four college respondents, there was a wide diversity of opinions on each item. For example, students' failing to provide supporting details for generalized statements has been identified as the most serious writing problem most commonly agreed on by both high school and college respondents, ranking one (college) and two (high school); yet by examining the tally sheet, one can see that a total of eight college instructors did not strongly agree that this was a serious writing problem, nor did seventeen of the high school teachers, or a total of 25 out of 54 (46 percent) did not strongly agree that the statement was a writing problem. (See Appendix II for tallies.)

It is interesting to note that the results of this study concur with many of the findings of the National Assessment of

Educational Progress concerning serious writing weaknesses. The weaknesses among seventeen year olds as pointed out by the NAEP in a 1977 study were as follows:

1. could not organize their ideas on paper
2. wrote incoherent paragraphs
3. wrote random sentences
4. used simple vocabularies in writing
5. did not revise<sup>1</sup>

These findings were confirmed in a subsequent study by the Third National Assessment of Educational Progress.<sup>2</sup>

By comparing the five weaknesses identified by NAEP with the seven most serious writing problems agreed upon by the respondents to this study,<sup>3</sup> one can see the similarities of the results.

A subtle finding of this study reflects the interest expressed by the high school and college respondents in a study designed ultimately to help smooth the transition of high school seniors to freshman composition. Based on the promptness of response, the percentage of response, and the comments, the high school teachers are by far more concerned with helping the students than are the college instructors. The thirty high

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Bishop, ed., The Concern for Writing: Focus 5, Bethesda, MD.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 159 674 1978, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>"News and the English Profession," English Journal 70 (March 1981): 6.

<sup>3</sup>The 7 most serious writing problems identified by this study are enumerated on page 61 of chapter 4.

school respondents (85.7 percent) far exceeded the expectations of this researcher. Nineteen of the responses (63 percent) were received within three days of the mailing. Fifteen (50 percent) made encouraging or helpful comments. No criticism was received from the high school respondents. Nine (30 percent) requested a copy of the results.

The college instructors' response was 24 out of 34 (70.6 percent). During the first three days only three responses were received and even after two weeks only seventeen had been received. It was through personal solicitation that three responses were finally received. The remaining four arrived during the next few weeks. Eight (33 percent) included encouraging or helpful comments; five (21 percent) included criticism. The criticism was mostly about the rating scale being hard to follow or the writing problems being too general. One respondent stated that the rating scale should read "almost always, frequently, occasionally, seldom, and hardly ever" and proceeded to change the questionnaire to agree with this scale. One encouragement came from a university professor in the form of a separate letter urging the publication of the results of this study since the information is greatly needed in Mississippi.

Some definite implications for the high school senior English teachers as indicated by this study are that they should reassess their positions on spelling, student use of cliches, and logical reasoning. Each of these writing problems was perceived as more serious by the college instructors than by the high school teachers. Poor spelling was ranked third in serious-

ness by the college respondents; eighth by the high school respondents. Student overuse of clichés ranked fourth among the college instructors, but only twenty-first among the high school teachers. Using inductive logic for supporting conclusions was viewed as more serious (fifth) among the college instructors than among the high school teachers (thirteenth).

Other implications for an individual senior English teacher can be derived by comparing his or her opinion on a writing problem to the mean and rank of the high school and college responses, especially those of the Mississippi college freshmen instructors, since most of the entering freshmen must be prepared for these instructors. By comparing his or her opinion with the results of this survey, he or she can determine his or her degree of agreement or disagreement. Since this survey was conducted within the dictates of a scientific study, it would be wise if an individual high school instructor redirected his or her priorities whenever they differed widely with those expressed by the Mississippi high school and college teachers surveyed.

Mississippi secondary and college composition teachers must make every effort to initiate and maintain a productive articulation program if the students are to have smoother transition from high school English to college freshman composition. Students are confronted with widely differing opinions at all levels of instruction. The confusion goes beyond the individual student to the individual instructor.

Until Mississippi English teachers organize and agree on composition standards, the student and teacher will continue to be confused.

356 Townes Avenue  
Grenada, Mississippi 38901  
October 15, 1980

Dear Fellow Senior English Teacher:

I need your assistance!

For years there has been a concern among the high school English teachers about how to adequately prepare our college-bound students for freshman composition. We have struggled against the "unknowns" as they fluctuate from one composition instructor to another. Motivated by this frustrating situation, I have undertaken a study to investigate the gap existing between high school English preparation and freshman composition expectations. I hope by surveying each college English department and a selected number of secondary departments to make a comparative analysis that will provide useful information to both.

This study is being conducted under the auspices of the Secondary Education English Department at the University of Mississippi and directed by Dr. Arlene Schrade.

The enclosed questionnaire should be completed by one of the senior English teachers in your department and promptly returned in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your participation in this study. If you would like a report on the results, please indicate this on the questionnaire.

Sincerely yours,

*Geneva England*

Mrs. Geneva England  
Candidate for Specialist Degree  
High School English Department Head

*Arlene Schrade*

Dr. Arlene Schrade  
Associate Professor of Secondary  
Education

356 Townes Avenue  
Grenada, Mississippi 38901  
October 15, 1980

Dear Chairman of the Department of English:

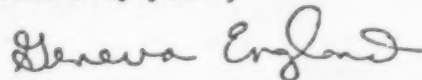
Enclosed herewith you will find a questionnaire for one of your freshmen composition instructors which we would appreciate your passing on and asking that it be completed and returned promptly in the enclosed envelope.

This questionnaire is part of a thesis study being conducted under the auspices of the Secondary Education English Department of the University of Mississippi and directed by Dr. Arlene Schrade.

The study is being conducted in an effort to investigate freshman composition expectations in comparison to high school English preparations. In view of the increasing number of college-bound students and the high number of freshman drop-outs, the study seems warranted. It is the sincere desire of this researcher to offer conclusions and recommendations for improving the articulation of the college-bound student.

Thank you for your department's assistance in this survey. It will increase the significance of this research, as well as provide a valued judgment to the study.

Sincerely yours,



Mrs. Geneva England  
Candidate for Specialist Degree  
High School English Department Head



Dr. Arlene Schrade  
Associate Professor of Secondary  
Education

## HIGH SCHOOL TALLY SHEET

30 Respondents

NA - No answer

SA - Strongly agree

A - Agree

? - Not sure whether I agree or disagree

D - Disagree

SD - Strongly Disagree

| NA | SA | A  | ?  | D  | SD | Writing Problems                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | 12 | 15 | 2  | 0  | 0  | 1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.                                                                                              |
|    | 11 | 16 | 0  | 3  | 0  | 2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                     |
|    | 8  | 14 | 5  | 3  | 0  | 3. Students are unable to organize their information into unified paragraphs.                                                                                           |
|    | 9  | 14 | 6  | 1  | 0  | 4. Students do not use the principles of deductive logic to draw their conclusions.                                                                                     |
|    | 5  | 18 | 2  | 5  | 0  | 5. Students weaken their sentences by using the passive voice and by beginning their sentences with "There is" or "It is,..."                                           |
| 1  | 8  | 10 | 10 | 1  | 0  | 6. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.                                                                                    |
|    | 6  | 19 | 2  | 3  | 0  | 7. Students fail to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences.                                                                                               |
|    | 5  | 10 | 9  | 6  | 0  | 8. Students automatically assume that their audience agrees with their value systems (e.g., They may assume that just to label an idea "socialist" is to discredit it.) |
|    | 4  | 16 | 5  | 5  | 0  | 9. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                |
|    | 6  | 17 | 1  | 5  | 1  | 10. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraphs to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                    |
|    | 4  | 8  | 6  | 11 | 1  | 11. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.                                                                                                         |
|    | 11 | 16 | 1  | 2  | 0  | 12. Students cannot write in a formal objective style (i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes into the writing.)                                                   |
|    | 1  | 9  | 7  | 12 | 1  | 13. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.                                                                                                      |
|    | 4  | 11 | 3  | 11 | 1  | 14. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials- Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.                                            |
|    | 8  | 12 | 2  | 7  | 1  | 15. Students do not revise their first draft.                                                                                                                           |
|    | 11 | 16 | 1  | 1  | 1  | 16. Students fail to proofread their papers.                                                                                                                            |
| 1  | 11 | 15 | 0  | 3  | 0  | 17. Students do not enjoy writing.                                                                                                                                      |
|    | 7  | 21 | 1  | 1  | 0  | 18. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.                                                                                                                      |
|    | 8  | 15 | 3  | 3  | 1  | 19. Students cannot outline formally.                                                                                                                                   |
|    | 5  | 16 | 2  | 7  | 0  | 20. Students write sentence fragments.                                                                                                                                  |
| 1  | 6  | 16 | 1  | 4  | 0  | 21. Students write run-on sentences.                                                                                                                                    |
|    | 3  | 15 | 8  | 4  | 0  | 22. Students overuse cliches.                                                                                                                                           |
|    | 7  | 21 | 2  | 0  | 0  | 23. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.                                                                                                                     |
|    | 5  | 9  | 6  | 9  | 1  | 24. Students do not know how to write a term paper.                                                                                                                     |
| 1  | 2  | 7  | 8  | 12 | 0  | 25. Students use inflated language.                                                                                                                                     |
|    | 5  | 9  | 5  | 11 | 0  | 26. Students do not know grammatical terminology.                                                                                                                       |
|    | 10 | 13 | 4  | 3  | 0  | 27. Students are poor spellers.                                                                                                                                         |
|    | 8  | 10 | 4  | 8  | 0  | 28. Students overuse commas.                                                                                                                                            |
| 1  | 2  | 13 | 3  | 11 | 0  | 29. Students underuse commas.                                                                                                                                           |
|    | 2  | 4  | 4  | 17 | 3  | 30. Students are poor at capitalization.                                                                                                                                |

## COLLEGE TALLY SHEET

24 respondents

NA= No Answer

SA = Strongly agree

A = Agree

7 = Not sure whether I agree or disagree

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

NA SA A 7 D SD.

## Writing Problems

|    |    |    |    |   |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|----|----|----|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16 | 7  | 0  | 1  | 0 | 1. Students fail to provide supporting details for generalized statements.                                                                                              |
| 5  | 18 | 1  | 0  | 0 | 2. Students fail to use transitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                     |
| 6  | 12 | 3  | 3  | 0 | 3. Students are unable to organize their information into unified paragraphs.                                                                                           |
| 3  | 16 | 3  | 2  | 0 | 4. Students do not use the principles of deductive logic to draw their conclusions.                                                                                     |
| 5  | 9  | 5  | 5  | 0 | 5. Students weaken their sentences by using the passive voice and by beginning their sentences with "There is" or "It is,..."                                           |
| 5  | 14 | 4  | 1  | 0 | 6. Students do not use the principles of inductive logic for supporting conclusions.                                                                                    |
| 1  | 5  | 12 | 6  | 2 | 7. Students fail to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences.                                                                                               |
| 6  | 10 | 4  | 4  | 0 | 8. Students automatically assume that their audience agrees with their value systems (e.g., They may assume that just to label an idea "socialist" is to discredit it.) |
| 4  | 15 | 3  | 2  | 0 | 9. Students fail to use word repetitions to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                                                |
| 3  | 16 | 2  | 3  | 0 | 10. Students fail to use clincher sentences at the end of paragraphs to develop paragraph coherence.                                                                    |
| 2  | 12 | 2  | 8  | 0 | 11. Students fail to use topic sentences in writing paragraphs.                                                                                                         |
| 5  | 12 | 4  | 3  | 0 | 12. Students cannot write in a formal objective style (i.e., personal colloquial language intrudes into the writing.)                                                   |
| 1  | 4  | 8  | 10 | 1 | 13. Students fail to select topics that they know something about.                                                                                                      |
| 3  | 9  | 4  | 8  | 0 | 14. Students do not know how to use basic reference materials- Thesaurus, readers' guide, encyclopedia, bibliographies, etc.                                            |
| 7  | 6  | 6  | 5  | 0 | 15. Students do not revise their first draft.                                                                                                                           |
| 8  | 10 | 3  | 3  | 0 | 16. Students fail to proofread their papers.                                                                                                                            |
| 6  | 11 | 6  | 1  | 0 | 17. Students do not enjoy writing.                                                                                                                                      |
| 2  | 18 | 2  | 2  | 0 | 18. Students fail to vary their sentence patterns.                                                                                                                      |
| 5  | 12 | 4  | 3  | 0 | 19. Students cannot outline formally.                                                                                                                                   |
| 1  | 3  | 14 | 3  | 3 | 20. Students write sentence fragments.                                                                                                                                  |
| 4  | 16 | 2  | 2  | 0 | 21. Students write run-on sentences.                                                                                                                                    |
| 6  | 13 | 4  | 1  | 0 | 22. Students overuse cliches.                                                                                                                                           |
| 1  | 4  | 16 | 1  | 2 | 23. Students fail to adequately limit their topics.                                                                                                                     |
| 5  | 13 | 3  | 3  | 0 | 24. Students do not know how to write a term paper.                                                                                                                     |
| 1  | 7  | 9  | 5  | 2 | 25. Students use inflated language.                                                                                                                                     |
| 4  | 12 | 4  | 4  | 0 | 26. Students do not know grammatical terminology.                                                                                                                       |
| 7  | 14 | 3  | 0  | 0 | 27. Students are poor spellers.                                                                                                                                         |
| 4  | 12 | 8  | 0  | 0 | 28. Students overuse commas.                                                                                                                                            |
| 2  | 1  | 3  | 8  | 9 | 29. Students underuse commas.                                                                                                                                           |
| 1  | 7  | 5  | 10 | 1 | 30. Students are poor at capitalization.                                                                                                                                |

## DATA FOR TABLE 3

## 30 HIGH SCHOOL RESPONDENTS

| No. yrs. experience in teaching composition |                  | No. of classes presently teaching |                  |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| H.S. seniors                                | college freshmen | H.S. seniors                      | College freshmen |
| 9                                           | 3                | 4                                 | 1                |
| 4                                           | 2                | 4                                 | 1                |
| 29                                          | 3                | 3                                 |                  |
| 25                                          | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  | 3                                 |                  |
| 5                                           | 8                | 2                                 |                  |
| 18                                          | 20               | 2                                 |                  |
| 15                                          |                  | 3                                 |                  |
| 20                                          |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 7                                           |                  | 3                                 |                  |
| 20                                          |                  | 4                                 |                  |
| 3                                           |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 13                                          |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 2                                           |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 8                                           |                  | 2                                 |                  |
| 1                                           |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 18                                          |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 7                                           |                  | 4                                 |                  |
| 15                                          |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 10                                          |                  | 3                                 |                  |
| 3                                           |                  | 2                                 |                  |
| 14                                          |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 10                                          |                  | 2                                 |                  |
| 9                                           |                  | 4                                 |                  |
| 5                                           |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 6                                           |                  | 2                                 |                  |
| 17                                          |                  | 5                                 |                  |
| 15                                          |                  | 4                                 |                  |
| 15                                          |                  | 3                                 |                  |
| 4                                           |                  | 1                                 |                  |
| 10                                          |                  | 2                                 |                  |
| T= 337                                      | 45.5             | 71                                | 2                |
| M= 11.23                                    | 1.52             | 2.37                              | .067             |

T=Total

M=Mean

## DATA FOR TABLE 10

## 24 COLLEGE RESPONDENTS

| No. yrs. experience in<br>teaching composition |                     | No. of classes presently<br>teaching |                     |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| H.S.<br>seniors                                | College<br>Freshmen | H. S.<br>seniors                     | College<br>freshmen |
| 9                                              | 7                   | 3                                    | 4                   |
| 13                                             | 13                  | 4                                    |                     |
| 23                                             | 1                   | 1                                    |                     |
| 16                                             | 3                   | 5                                    |                     |
| 4                                              | 7                   | 4                                    |                     |
| 4                                              | 8                   | 1                                    |                     |
| 35                                             | 6                   | 4                                    |                     |
| 7                                              | 13                  | 2                                    |                     |
| 13                                             | 24                  | 2                                    |                     |
| 22                                             | 3                   | 3                                    |                     |
| 20                                             | 17                  | 4                                    |                     |
| 12                                             |                     | 3                                    |                     |
| 11                                             |                     | 2                                    |                     |
| 6                                              |                     | 5                                    |                     |
| 5                                              |                     | 2                                    |                     |
| 26                                             |                     | 2                                    |                     |
| 23                                             |                     | 3                                    |                     |
| 11                                             |                     | 3                                    |                     |
| 17                                             |                     | 5                                    |                     |
| 11                                             |                     | 3                                    |                     |
| 11                                             |                     | 2                                    |                     |
| 8½                                             |                     | 4                                    |                     |
| 9½                                             |                     | N.A.=2                               |                     |
| N.A.=1                                         |                     |                                      |                     |
| T= 283                                         | 102                 | 57                                   | 4                   |
| M= 12.3                                        | 4.25                | 2.59                                 | .17                 |

N.A.= no answer

T = Total

M = Mean

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